

**Scotland's Census 2021  
Outputs Strategy Stakeholder Event Summary**

**May 2018**

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## 1. Introduction

National Records of Scotland (NRS) held a series of stakeholder events in February and March 2018, discussing the [Scotland's Census 2021 Outputs Strategy](#) that was published February 2018.

NRS invited users who had previously expressed an interest in outputs. The event was also promoted through the Scotland's Census newsletter, twitter and on the [Scotland's Census website](#).

At the event a [presentation](#) was delivered which briefly covered the Outputs Strategy, and gave attendees more detail about which aspects of 2021 outputs will differ from 2011. The presentation and hand-outs from the event were made available online after the event, along with an online survey for users who had been unable to attend the event to give feedback. This survey closed Friday 13<sup>th</sup> April.

In total 43 stakeholders attended over the four sessions, representing a range of different areas including; local government, academics, special interest groups and members of the public.

## 2. Flexible Table Builder and Standard Tables

In 2011, NRS produced over 400 standard tables, and if users required something that had not been produced then they could request this through the commissioned table service. In 2021, we are planning to reduce the number of standard tables produced and allow users to create their own tables using a flexible table builder.

Stakeholders were asked what they thought of the proposed reduction in standard outputs, and the ability to create their own tables in 2021.

Overall, most attendees were happy with the flexible table builder, particularly if the data is available earlier. It was felt that this would save time as users would not have to wait for a commissioned table, and could create the table in the format needed from the start. Some expressed concern about the fact that small geographies will not add up to Council Area (CA) totals.

Stakeholders seemed content with the reduction in standard tables, given that users would be able to create their own tables. Some stakeholders gave feedback about other tables they thought should be included, and some planned to speak to colleagues or users first. There was a suggestion that a range of ethnicity variables should be released as standard as there have been issues with ethnicity breakdowns previously. One stakeholder suggested that variables which are least available from other data sources (ethnicity, national identity and religion were highlighted) should be prioritised for standard tables. A small number of stakeholders raised the issue that the reduction in the number of standard tables seemed as though we were passing the work of creating the tables onto other groups.

When using the flexible table builder users will be able to create a table from scratch, or start from a standard table and edit this as needed. Stakeholders thought this was a good idea, and the need for functionality to look up existing tables easily was highlighted. Stakeholders also liked that they would be able to save their own tables and custom geographies, and raised an interest in a mapping tool to enable easy selection and creation of bespoke geographies. One stakeholder expressed an interest in custom variable breakdowns, for example for age.

There was some concern that the flexible table builder may be intimidating or hard to use. NRS is planning to hold training events to help users with the flexible table builder in advance of census data being released. Stakeholders felt this was a good idea, and suggested we could have online training, such as a video showing how to create a table.

Some stakeholders also expressed concern about the Statistical Disclosure Control (SDC) issues of a flexible table builder, but these concerns were alleviated by the fact that there will be rules/restrictions in the table builder.

Stakeholders asked whether census data from previous years would be available in the flexible table builder. Due to the range of tables already produced, and the different SDC methodology it will not be possible to include census data from previous years in the flexible table builder. Stakeholders suggested that it would be sensible to include variable breakdowns for 2021 that were comparable with previous years to aid comparison. Some stakeholders expressed an interest in using older census geographies in the flexible table builder, to allow comparison with previous Censuses for small areas where boundaries have changed.

### **3. Release Schedule**

NRS are committed to releasing the first census outputs in March 2022, earlier than they were released in 2011. The change in SDC methodology and the use of a flexible table builder means that the release schedule in 2021 will differ from 2011. These differences were highlighted to users, with a broad release schedule. Users were asked for their thoughts on the release schedule, and whether this would meet their needs.

Stakeholders were positive about the proposed released schedule, although some commented that it seemed ambitious. Some stakeholders were more interested in low geographies, but were content with council area data being released first as there is a larger need for this. One attendee expressed the opinion that all census work should be completed much faster.

Stakeholders thought that the timings seemed sensible and would meet timings for their own releases and publications. One stakeholder noted that March is the ideal month for output releases with respect to local authority annual budgets, and any earlier could cause problems. One stakeholder commented that workplace statistics and origin destination statistics were last, but that this was still earlier than in 2011.

Some stakeholders commented that staggering Census output releases is helpful in workload planning, both for data users and for other data providers who respond to a high volume of data requests following each release.

#### **4. Variable Breakdowns**

In 2011, variable breakdowns in standard tables from questions with tick boxes, and a text box were largely based on tick box options. In 2021, NRS are proposing that we take account of the size of write in responses to release more detail where possible. Stakeholders were given a [hand-out](#) that contained details of the standard breakdowns for specified variables, and the detailed tables for these variables. Users were asked whether this extra detail would be beneficial to their work, and if it would be useful.

Overall stakeholders liked the proposed change to variable breakdowns. It was thought that this was sensible and there were potential benefits for policy and analysis. Several stakeholders gave details on areas that this extra detail would benefit their work. Some stakeholders thought that it was interesting, but would not be useful for their work. Others didn't have a need for this extra detail, but would use it if it was available.

Stakeholders were satisfied with the proposed groupings, and language was raised as being particularly important to have this extra detail. Some stakeholders also raised that it was more important to have a UK harmonised variable for their work, and this detail will still be available.

There was some concern that this would delay outputs, however as this information is already captured it will not affect the release schedule.

#### **5. Online Feedback Survey**

After the Outputs Strategy was published an online survey was made available for interested parties to complete. The presentation from the events, and the variable breakdowns hand-out were also put online. The survey was open for ten weeks.

NRS received nineteen responses to the survey, but six were excluded from analysis as they did not contain any information.

NRS asked respondents how satisfied they were with the Outputs Strategy for Scotland's 2021 Census. Twelve users were satisfied or highly satisfied, and one was neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. No respondents stated that they were dissatisfied with the Outputs Strategy.

Respondents were asked whether the order and timing of the release schedule would suit their needs, and to provide any comments on this. Eight responded that the order and timing met their needs, one that the order would but timing would not, one that timing would but order would not, and one that neither order nor timing would meet their needs. Of the three respondents who were not happy with the order

or the timing, two commented, both specifying specific topics they were interested in and would like to be available sooner.

NRS asked whether the flexible table builder would be beneficial to respondents, or their organisation, and for any comments on the flexible table builder. Eleven respondents stated that it would be somewhat beneficial or highly beneficial, and one stated that it would not be beneficial. Respondents who commented, stated that this would be very useful to get the data they wanted more quickly and easily than in previous censuses where they have had to request tables. One respondent also expressed an interest in creating custom age bands and the use of an application programming interface (API).

NRS asked respondents whether a reduction in the number of standard tables would have a negative impact, given the availability of a flexible table builder. Of the 12 respondents who answered this question, 50 per cent stated this would not impact their work, and 50 per cent that this would impact their work to some extent. Of those who stated it would have some impact, some then responded that they were unsure what this impact would be, or that it would be fine if the data was available through the flexible table builder. Others felt the impact would be reduced if there was a way to send the same table to others, or if tables on specific topics were created as standard.

Respondents were asked if any of the 2011 standard output tables were of particular importance, ten answered this question and these responses will be considered going forward when evaluating which tables will be produced in 2021.

NRS asked whether it would be useful to have more detail available in variable breakdowns, and for which topics this extra detail would be of particular use. Ten respondents thought it would be somewhat useful or very useful, and two did not know how useful this would be. Eight respondents thought this detail would be useful for ethnicity, seven for language, six for national identity and four for religion.

## **6. Next Steps**

NRS will consider all of the feedback received and will use this to further develop and enhance the Outputs Strategy on an iterative basis. We will also be taking the following specific actions in response to the feedback we received:

1. Following up with specific stakeholder groups around producing more detailed variable breakdowns in standard tables and the flexible table builder for ethnicity, religion and language.
2. Liaising with stakeholders who have volunteered to assist with testing the API for the flexible table builder.
3. Considering in more detail the recommendations for standard tables to come up with a proposed list for further engagement with stakeholders.

During the stakeholder events we also received a number of queries about other areas within the census programme and NRS, which have been passed to the relevant areas for response.

We will continue to engage with stakeholders during this process as our plans develop further to ensure that the outputs from Scotland's Census 2021 meet user needs.

More information and details about upcoming events can be found on the [Scotland's Census website](#), by subscribing to the [Scotland's Census newsletter](#) and following us on Twitter [@NatRecordsScot](#)